

**MINUTES OF THE BLACK BELT COMMISSION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
February 10, 2012
Lowndes County Board of Education Office
Hayneville, AL**

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Friday, February 10, 2012 at the Lowndes County Board of Education Office in Hayneville, AL. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office
Mayor Sheldon Day, Co-Chair
Margaret Bentley, Co-Chair
Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, Education Committee
William Scott, Congresswoman Sewell's Selma Office
Chad Nichols, Co-Chair – Health Committee
Dr. Nick Stinnett, University of Alabama, Chair, Families Committee
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee
Donald Mills, Chair, Small Business Committee
Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Commission
Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Regional Commission
Robert Lake, West Alabama Regional Commission
Candy Capel, Project Manager
Thomas Moore, Project Manager
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director

Mayor Sheldon Day, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

Margaret Bentley, Co-Chair, also welcomed everyone. She informed everyone that since she is no longer with Alabama Power Company, she feels it would be best for her to step down as Co-Chair, but not until she puts someone in place with connection to the Power Company.

Ron Sparks, ARDO Director, gave his comments:

- Stated what an honor it is to work with this group of people.
- Asked everyone to not believe everything they see in the paper. He has spoken with the Governor and he's fine with the situation.
- Welcomed **Dr. Stinnett** as **Chair** of the **Families Committee**.
- Congratulated **Mayor Day** on his collaboration with Wilcox County to make this huge project work. Stated that rural development has a lot going on at the present time.
- Reported how excited he is about the **"World's Widest Yard Sale"** that will be held May 31 – June 2, 2012 along U. S. Highway 80.
- Stated once again that we need an airplane at the Tuskegee exit.
- Said that Chad would give a report on the Verizon grant for KidCheck and that he's talked with Governor Bentley about the program.

- Talked about the **Dialysis Center** in Perry County. It looks as if this is really going to happen now.
- Discussed the \$30 million **Telemedicine** grant which should be awarded before next meeting. Governor Bentley is committed to telehealth.
- Discussed the **broadband** situation and what's actually been done.
- Reported he's working with Shirley and Tyson on **transportation** trying to get the right people together
- Reported Ross had been transferred to the Legislative Affairs Office.
- Would have to leave early to attend the funeral of Senator Wendell Mitchell.
- Thanked Dr. Boyd for his support of **Telemedicine**.

Sheldon Day, Co-Chair, discussed the following:

- Relationships in the Black Belt and how people come together to make things happen.
- Reported **Lakeside Steel** announced a third project in the area and will soon announce a fourth project. Will probably have other spinoffs.
- One million tons a year will be shipped along railroad. This is a \$60 million increase in business just to the railroad.
- Working with **Golden Dragon Copper**. They were first looking around Birmingham for a location. Convinced them to come to Thomasville to look.
- Looking back, it's taken the city of Thomasville 12 to 14 years for this to come to fruition.
- The city tried to show representatives its identity and the direction the city is going. Talked about their community orchestra and the high school performing arts group.
- The city has partnered with **Alabama Southern** to teach welding in the high school class rooms.
- **George Alford** is talking with Southern Industrial.
- **Wilcox County** is .8 mile from **Clarke County line**.
- Golden Dragon came back and said they needed a bigger site. Showed them the site in Wilcox County. **John Clyde** played a vital role along with a team of people from ADO dubbed "**Team Wilcox**."
- **John Clyde** took the lead with team from Pine Hill, Wilcox County Commission and Camden.
- He thanked the Governor for his support.
- Wilcox County has the highest unemployment rate at 16.9%.
- Plan is to take the unemployed and give them an opportunity. Those individuals need to be identified from within.
- Since the beginning, there has been a capital investment of \$300 million dollars.
- Made statement, "If we lift the Black Belt up can you imagine what it will do for the entire state?"
- This will put thousands of dollars into the schools in Wilcox County and benefit all of Alabama.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE – John Zippert, Chair, reported –

- He was pleased to be able to be present for the meeting.
- Reported there is a bio-refinery coming to Greene County.
- Trying to reach people in community who need additional training in order to work in facility.

***Mayor Day** commented he might be able to assist with that and getting the Alabama Career Center and the public library involved.

- Reported he had issues of the Green County Democrat with picture and article about the groundbreaking held for the **Black Belt Fruit and Vegetable Marketing and Innovation Center** near Selma.
- More funding has been secured for the facility. Building will commence when the weather is better.
- Working on training plan for the cooperative.
- Some farmers have been engaged with a project with Walmart selling watermelons and peas.
- There's learning on both sides with this project, but things are looking promising for moving forward. Once center is going, they can market to more markets; Sysco, Whitfield. Farmers Cooperative will organize financing for drip irrigation systems for the growing season.
- This has been the main project of the Agriculture Committee at this point and will serve small family farmers.
- There are 180 claims filed in the Black Belt Farmers Lawsuit against the Department of Agriculture.
- It's taken ten years to get Congress to authorize settlement from the first lawsuit.
- It's a fifteen-page claim form. Stated if anyone knew anyone who qualifies and needs assistance completing form, the Federation is available.
- Some people don't meet all the qualifications which creates difficult situation and there's lots of misinformation going around. We at the Federation need to know these things.
- He's been contacted by a group promoting the production of bamboo. This may be a future project for the committee.
- Up side and down side to bamboo. However, it would grow in a lot of the Black Belt counties

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – Dr. David Hale, Chair, Project Manager, reported –

- Committee is working on existing projects that have been reported previously.
- Committee plans to meet with A2D regarding the Alabama Broadband initiative.

CULTURAL AND YOUTH – Carol Zippert, Chair, Thomas Moore, Project manager, reported –

- The Committee is partnering with the Community Development committee to host educational seminars in various Black Belt counties regarding applying for BBCF grants.
- Also informed participants about forming 501©3 corporations.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - Felecia Jones, Chair, Thomas Moore, Program Manager, reported-

- Committee is working on plans for the annual grants workshop.
- Also working on how to assist people with incorporation procedures.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, reported-

- Working on grant proposals for \$30 million dollar Telemedicine initiative to serve the Black Belt.
- Working on a Black Belt \$50 million dollar grant/teacher incentive fund project to implement a performance based reward system. Hopeful in getting this grant.
- Met with A2D to discuss how the broadband initiative will affect education in the Black Belt.
- Another teacher development conference this summer will focus on something other than reading and drop-out prevention.

Co-Chair Sheldon Day reported he had gone to Piedmont, AL and looked at their program where each student is provided their own Apple computer. This area shares some of the same statistics the Black Belt has. These are 4th through 12th grade. This area raised a tax to cover cost. Teachers help break down problems at home by going 1-1, which is great especially in rural communities. This is important and what the international businesses want to see in Education.

Bob Lake asked a question regarding the Pell Grant Program dropping from 32,000 to 31,000 . He wanted to know if it was true and if so, what can be done.

Dr. Boyd stated that the reason behind this is the free and reduced rate has increased. 98.15 reflects prosperity and the federal government is not putting out as many. Income level requirements should reflect an increase. He stated he would research this and report on this at next meeting.

FAMILIES COMMITTEE – Dr. Nick Stinnett, Co-Chair – Ginger Rue, Project Manager:

- Introduced himself and talked about plans he has for the **Families Committee**.
- Stated he appreciates the work of the various committees.
- Plans to take a holistic approach and he's looking forward to learning more.
- Plans to identify strengths of families in the Black Belt and celebrate strengths through arts, school, churches and media.
- Plans to do a needs assessment of families.

HEALTH COMMITTEE — Congresswoman Terri Sewell and Chad Nichols, Co-Chairs, reported:

- Focusing on lots of fronts right now with one focus on keeping kids healthy.
- KidCheck program is going full speed. Announced the 2nd Verizon grant to KidCheck to bring wireless technology in the schools with a very detailed computer system.
- Reported ABC 33/40 covered KidCheck Plus wireless screening event February 6th and featured on their “Focus@4” TV show on the 7th.
- Plans are to reach out to other school systems.
- In process of building strong partnership with dental.
- Thinking in terms of making KidCheck days even more fun with a possible mascot.
- Talked about the “**growing more physicians**” program with Dr. Wheat and the U of A.
- Perry County is moving forward with negotiations with **Davita Medical Services**. Frances Ford with Sowing Seeds of Hope met with **Davita** and they’re waiting on Perry County Commission to purchase building to lease to **Davita**.
- It would be great to have BBC meeting in Perry County to coincide with the opening of the dialysis clinic.
- Telemedicine will come into play when it becomes a reality.
- Talked about the telemedicine grant that has been submitted and thanked Ron for bringing so many folks together to get this done. This could be the #1 thing that’s accomplished if it works out.
- Talked about KidCheck and Congresswoman Sewell’s February 16th tour of Birmingham City schools. Medical, dental and nursing will all be working together to screen kids. UAB medical will be collaborating.
- **William Scott** reported he would be leaving Congresswoman Sewell’s office to start his own business; a state of the art virtual office which will open in March.

Co-Chair Sheldon Day said he appreciated everything that’s been done with the **Health Committee** and thanked Chad for building such great partnerships.

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE – Bea Forniss, Chair, - Thomas Moore, Program Manager, reported:

- Bea has been promoted to Division Chief, Community and Economic Development Division for ADECA. She will be in a great position to help the Commission.

MANUFACTURING COMMITTEE – George Alford, Chair, Candy Capel reported-

- Currently working on large industrial project in Wilcox County.

MARKETING & TOURISM –Pam Swanner, Chair, Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –

- On project “World’s Widest Yard Sale” progress.

- Meeting of representatives from cities and towns along Highway 80 is February 16th in Montgomery at Center for Commerce Building 7th Floor Auditorium.
- Still working on lodge and landowners educational sessions for Bullock, Hale and Wilcox counties.

SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Dr. James Mitchell, Chair, Candy Cappel, Project Manager, reported-

- No report

SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE – Donald Mills, Chair, reported:

- On conference call of February 7th.
The technology workshop was a success in Demopolis and the E-Bay presentation was very successful.
- Currently working on entrepreneurial event for women and youth and a minority entrepreneurial event.
- Upcoming tax workshop for small business owners February 23, 2012 at Demopolis Higher Education Center from 9:00 a.m. to 12 Noon.
- Also planning event on disaster recovery for small businesses.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE – Shirley Worthington, Chair -

- Shirley discussed attending meeting with Ron and Tyson to discuss transportation problem in the Black Belt. Looking at possible things that could be done to address this problem.

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:

John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission – (Absent)

Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission, reported –

- Commission has been very involved with the Tuskegee Airmen Museum and actively working toward some type of signage at the Tuskegee exit.

Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Commission, reported –

- The Commission is heading up a project funded through EDA to assist businesses in all seven counties with developing a continuity plan in the event of a disaster.
- A resource manual is being provided gleaned from a FEMA program but tailored to the individual counties.
- There is a series of meetings taking place, grouping two or three counties together. The project will end this year.

Mayor Sheldon Day gave closing remarks and the meeting adjourned for a delicious lunch prepared by **Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair of the Education Committee.**